The 14-Day Life-Left Experiment

The one rule
Week One: Observe and intervene upstream
Week Two: The handoff and life left

THIS IS NOT A CHALLENGE. THERE IS NO STREAK TO protect and no prize for completing every day exactly as written.

The purpose is to find out which parts of your workday are consuming the rest of your life and which small changes return the most capacity. For fourteen days, you will collect enough information to make better decisions without turning yourself into a research project.

Use paper, a note on your phone, or the pages below. Do not build a new tracking system unless you already enjoy tracking.

The one rule

Change only one major variable at a time. If you change your bedtime, diet, phone settings, work schedule, exercise, medication timing, and household routine in the same week, you will learn almost nothing about what mattered. The experiment is deliberately modest. You are looking for leverage.

Week One: Observe and intervene upstream

The first week stays inside the workday: what is expensive, when capacity narrows, and what changes before you leave.

Day 1: Establish the baseline

Do not improve anything today. At the end of work, fill in the one-week log from Chapter 5 (“Look for repeatable conditions”). Then add only what the log does not cover:
Work ended: _____ **I got home / switched out of work mode at:** _____ **State on arrival:**

- green: basically available
- amber: reduced capacity
- red: minimum-only

First thing I did after work: _____
At 8 p.m., I felt: _____
Bedtime: _____ Then answer one sentence:

The most expensive part of today was _____.

Do not judge the answer.

Day 2: Map the drains

Use the Drain Map from Chapter 4 at the end of today. Rate each drain from 0 to 3 and circle the top two.

Top two drains today: _____ /

_____

What caused them: _____

Do not solve anything yet. You are identifying what is expensive.

Day 3: Find the invisible work

Today, make two short lists.

Work I am paid to do

Write the actual job. Examples:

- analyze data;
- answer customer questions;
- teach;
- write code;
- manage projects;
- perform procedures;
- create designs;
- make decisions.

Work I do around the work

Examples:

- reread messages repeatedly;
- hide confusion;
- stay online during lunch;

- answer immediately;
- overprepare;
- remember everything without writing it down;
- soothe coworkers;
- suppress movement;
- work late to avoid tomorrow's discomfort;
- pretend the environment is not overstimulating.

Circle one item in the second list that costs you something but does not buy enough value. Do not remove it yet. Just notice it.

Day 4: Run the 3 p.m. checkpoint

At about 3 p.m., stop for less than two minutes and run the 3 p.m. checkpoint from Chapter 5 ("The 3 p.m. checkpoint"), using its five questions as written there.

Tonight, note one thing: did the evening go the way the checkpoint predicted?

Day 5: Protect the workday close

Today, change only the final work hour. Thirty to sixty minutes before your planned end time:

1. stop voluntarily starting new non-urgent tasks;
2. capture anything you are afraid you will forget;
3. write tomorrow's first action;
4. leave a restart note for anything unfinished;
5. meet one physical need before leaving: food, water, bathroom, medication as prescribed, or movement.

Then leave at the planned time if your role allows it. Tonight ask:

Did protecting the last hour change who arrived home?

Yes / no / unclear.
If yes, what changed? _____

Day 6: Leave something unfinished on purpose

Choose a low-risk work task that does not truly need completion today. Stop at your planned end time. Before stopping, write:

Where I am: _____

Next action: _____

What I need to remember: _____

When I will return: _____

Notice the discomfort. Do not use discomfort as evidence that stopping was wrong. Tomorrow, see whether the restart is as difficult as predicted.

Day 7: Remove one work tax

Return to the "work around the work" list from Day 3. Choose one repeated behavior to reduce today. Examples: Do not reread ordinary emails more than once before sending. Take one real lunch break. Use written notes openly instead of pretending to remember. Let one non-urgent message wait.

Decline one optional request. Use headphones for one focus block. Do not volunteer to solve a problem that belongs to someone else. Choose:

Today I will reduce: _____

At the end of the day:

Did anything bad actually happen? _____

Did it change my evening? _____

Week Two: The handoff and life left

The second week follows what remains across the handoff and into the rest of your life, then asks whether the arrangement is sustainable.

Day 8: Design the landing

Choose a landing that takes between ten and thirty minutes. Do not choose what sounds healthy. Choose what matches your dominant drain.

If socially depleted

Quiet, low conversation, headphones, shower, walk alone, sit somewhere private.

If sensory overloaded

Lower light, change clothes, reduce sound, cooler room, shower, remove uncomfortable items.

If under-stimulated (attention drain)

Music, brisk movement, a short interesting podcast, playful activity, quick outdoor change of scene.

If executive depleted

Use a pre-decided sequence and pre-decided food. Avoid asking yourself broad questions.

If physically tired

Sit or lie down intentionally, eat, hydrate, address pain or other body needs, and use a defined re-entry point. Write your sequence:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Landing ends at / when: _____
The ending matters.

Day 9: Interrupt automatic phone use

Do not ban the phone. Before the first recreational unlock after work, name what you want from it.

I want _____.

Possible answers: stimulation; silence from other people; distraction; contact; avoidance; humor; numbing; something easy; time that belongs to me. Use the phone if you want. Set a timer for fifteen minutes only as an observation point, not a command to stop. At the timer, ask:

Am I getting what I came here for? If yes, continue deliberately. If no, switch to another activity that serves the function better.

Day 10: Build your minimum evening

Tonight, dinner is not a test. Use a reduced-capacity meal even if you technically could cook something more impressive. The purpose is to experience the difference between feeding yourself and producing dinner. Choose the meal before 4 p.m. if possible. Write it here:

Tonight I am eating: _____

Number of decisions after work required to make that happen: _____ After eating, notice whether anything else becomes easier. You are testing sequence.

Then write the plan for the nights when none of this works.

My emergency food

_____

The one thing that protects tomorrow

_____

The one household mess that must be contained

_____

My easiest way to wind down

_____

One thing I am still allowed to enjoy

_____

Keep this somewhere visible. Do not improve it into a routine. This is the floor.

Day 11: Ask for one specific support

Choose one repeated problem involving another person. A manager. Partner. Coworker. Family member. Friend. Ask for one specific behavioral change. Examples: "Can you send action items in writing after our meetings?" "Can you own dinner Tuesday and Thursday, including deciding what we are eating?" "When I come home, can we wait fifteen minutes before household questions unless something is urgent?"

"I want to see you, but weekday dinners are hard. Could we walk near my house instead?" "I need one protected hour in the morning without Slack unless something is urgent." Write the ask before you make it:

_____

Notice whether specificity changes the conversation.

Day 12: Put life before maintenance

Protect thirty to ninety minutes for something that is neither paid work nor household maintenance. Choose something with a low activation cost. If needed, make the first version extremely small. Walk seven minutes. Read five pages. Go to one class. Play one song. Call one friend.

Sit outside with coffee. Watch something you deliberately chose without multitasking. Write:

The activity: _____

What usually prevents it: _____

How I reduced the entry cost: _____

Do not clean first in order to earn it.

Day 13: Test the weekend ceiling

Decide now how much maintenance the coming weekend is allowed to consume. Choose one: **Time ceiling:** _____ hours or **Task ceiling:** _____ major tasks Then schedule one block of actual life before maintenance fills the available space.

Protected block: _____

This is a test of what happens when maintenance has to compete with a life instead of automatically outranking it.

Day 14: The Life-Left Review

Look back over the two weeks. Do not count how many days you "succeeded." Answer these questions.

1 **Which workday drain showed up most often?**

_____

2 **Which single change produced the biggest improvement?**

_____

3 **What did I think was an evening problem that was actually created earlier in the day?**

_____

4 **What unpaid home load lands on my lowest-capacity hours?**

_____

5 **What do I use my phone for after work?**

_____

6 **What kind of rest actually makes me more available afterward?**

_____

7 **Which night consistently needs to be lower-demand?**

_____

8 **What am I doing at work that is optional but expensive?**

_____

9 **What support or conversation have I been postponing?**

_____

10 **Is my exhaustion stable, improving, worsening, or newly different?**

_____

11 **Does anything here deserve professional evaluation rather than another self-management experiment?**

_____

12 **Run the Life-Left Test (Chapter 17). Does my current work arrangement usually leave enough capacity for basic care, relationships, personal responsibilities, recovery, and some non-obligatory life?**

Yes / partly / no / I need more data

13 **Does anything here need a larger change: treatment, accommodations, workload, health evaluation, or the job itself?**

_____

Now choose only three changes to keep. **I will keep:**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Everything else can wait.